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METHODISM TODAY

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The aim and point of view of this paper demand definition at the outset. Two facts are fully recognized. First, that which unites American Protestantism in faith and life is far greater than that which divides, and it is the common heritage and task which especially interest us today. Second, the main influences which mold life and thought today bear alike upon us all. The most significant lines of division today are not the vertical lines that mark off one communion from the other, but the lateral lines of stratification that run through all alike. But these very considerations give the reason for such a report as this. It is because of our common faith and task that we wish to know how the tides of life and thought are moving at other places. And a third consideration points the same way. Our interest is in unity today, but not necessarily in uniformity. There are diversities of gifts and of ministrations, and the larger spirit of fellowship makes us only the more interested in asking each of the other: What have you to offer to our common life, and how fares it with you? This paper is to consider Methodism in America, and to this broader field most of the discussion will apply. The more specific statements, however, have reference to the Methodist Episcopal church of which the writer can best speak from personal knowledge.

THE HISTORICAL CHARACTER OF METHODISM

The Methodism of today can hardly be understood without reference to the Methodism of yesterday, for its merits and its defects, its progress and its problems are all determined in measure by the special character that has marked the movement from the beginning. It is true that it is not easy to define the differentia of Methodism. Though marked by definite convictions constantly proclaimed, Methodism did not begin with a doctrinal issue; the articles of religion which Wesley gave to the American church were simply a revision of the Thirty-nine Articles. Nor did Methodism begin with a doctrine of the church or theory of church organization. Its organization, though an outstanding feature, was shaped by practical needs, its ritual was inherited, and neither was ever considered the article of a standing or falling church. And though Methodism's moral emphasis has always been strong, it did not begin as a reform movement. The central concern of Methodism has always been her conception of religion, religion as a personal relation, a life of conscious fellowship with God in the power of the Holy Spirit and with the fruit of holy life and loving service. Anglicanism is fundamentally a doctrine of the church, as is Roman Catholicism in more thoroughgoing fashion; Calvinism is primarily a doctrine of God; Methodism is a doctrine of religion.

It is this central conception of Methodism that explains its outstanding characteristics: the message emphasized by its preachers, its conception of Christian doctrine, and the nature and meaning of its organization. These men, like the men of the early Christian community, had discovered religion as a life, not an institution or a doctrine, a ritual or a code, but as a new life of joy and peace and moral power. This explains Methodist preaching, central in the Methodist movement, but it explains Methodist theology as well. Within the realm of this experience lay the interest of Methodist theology, and the interests here involved determined the doctrine. This life was God's free gift intended for all men, so that Methodists would have naught of a limiting election. This life any man could receive if he would, and this he must work out with fear and trembling, so they rejected fore-

ordination and determinism with irresistible grace, and emphasized human freedom and moral responsibility. And all this in turn explains the third characteristic, Methodism as an organized and aggressive movement. From such an experience and such a conviction there followed the character of Methodism as an aggressive evangelistic movement, its central figure not a bishop with authority, nor a rector with his robes, nor a teacher among his books, but an itinerant preacher with his message. From this conception of religion follows the other aspect of organized Methodism, its interest in religious fellowship and oversight, so that the new life might be conserved and developed. Thus from this central interest there sprang class meeting, prayer meeting, lay preaching, itinerant ministry, and the rest.¹ The personality of Wesley himself entered in here as a great factor in developing this organization, but the main reason for this, aside from his administrative genius, was because this conception of religion was dominant with him.

METHODIST THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT

It is with this background in mind that we are able to understand the theological position and temper of Methodism, its combination of essential conservatism with an open-minded and progressive spirit. The connection is clearly seen in Wesley himself. He had no quarrel with the doctrinal standards of Anglicanism, though he balked a little at the damnatory clauses of the Athanasian Creed. He was delivered alike from dogmatic conservatism and speculative radicalism because he rejected that intellectualistic conception of religion in which both of these root. His extraordinary liberality did not come from indifferentism but from a discerning appreciation of what religion really was. "We may die without the knowledge of many truths," he wrote, "and yet be carried into Abraham's bosom; but if we die without love, what will knowledge avail? I am sick of opinions. Give me solid and substantial religion; give me a humble, gentle lover of God and man." He had words of appreciation for men whom orthodox and evangelical thought had summarily cast out, for Montanists and Trappist monks, for Pelagius, Servetus, and Loyola. He published

for the edification of his followers the biography of Thomas Firmin, a Socinian, declaring that he could not gainsay facts though he had once held that there could be no real religion without correct opinion of the Trinity. His emphasis upon the certainty which came with religious experience gave him a certain further freedom in relation to external standards. He was not disturbed by a Bible discrepancy, like that of the genealogical tables of the Gospels, and he anticipated by nearly a century and a half the recent action of the Anglican church in revising the Psalter, eliminating certain psalms as not being fit for the lips of a Christian congregation.

To this fine tradition the Methodist church on the whole has been loyal. It has been generally free from unbalanced radicalism of thought as from a heresy-hunting spirit. The saving element in both cases has been its dominant concern with a vital religion. Divisions among Methodists have not been due to doctrinal disputes. The test which Methodists usually apply first to doctrine or church movement is that of the bearing upon life. The general trend of thought in the church may readily be seen by noting the publications of the Book Concern, the materials of religious education put forth by the Board of Sunday Schools, the teachings of the theological schools, and the prescribed course of study for ministers. These indicate a general acceptance of the historical method of biblical study and its more assured results, a growing appreciation of the social aspects of religion and of the significance of religious nurture, and a sympathetic understanding of other movements of religious thought.

Other tendencies, of course, have not been wanting. There has been vigorous opposition at such points as biblical study and the program of religious education with its underlying ideals. The tendency to emphasize practical interests has sometimes prevented the frank and thoroughgoing consideration of principles. Anomalous elements have not been wanting. Such is the retention of creed subscription as a requirement of church membership. This was inserted only a half-century ago in the church ritual. It contradicts the position repeatedly asserted by Wesley who made no other condition of membership than the earnest purpose to

lead a Christian life, and it violates the original "General Rules" which are a part of the constitution of the church. It was eliminated four years ago in the report of a commission on the revision of the ritual, but the proposed return to the original practice and to the Wesleyan position was nullified by the action of the bishops to whom the report was referred for final consideration. Another attempt to eliminate this was made at the last general conference, the judiciary committee having reported that it was in violation of the constitution, but this failed also. Anomalous also is the fact that the communion which has most strongly emphasized the gift and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the church should deny this doctrine by seeking to place its articles of religion beyond possibility of revision at any later time. On the whole, however, the church has been true to Wesley's fine statement of principle:

In our first conference it was agreed to examine every point from the foundation. Have we not been somewhat fearful in doing this? What were we afraid of? Of overturning our first principles? Whoever was afraid of that, it was a vain fear. For if they are true, they will bear the strictest examination. If they are false, the sooner they are overturned the better. Let us all pray for a willingness to receive light.

Turning from these general considerations, it may be observed that certain modern movements in theology have found congenial soil, if not anticipation, in Methodist thinking. Here may be considered first of all the discussions that center about the nature of truth, the method of knowledge, and the character of authority in religion. Without having worked out the principles involved, Methodism furnished an anticipation of the line of thought that runs through Schleiermacher and Ritschl to some of the present-day pragmatists. In both cases, religion finds its own foundation and lives by its own right. Religious truth is neither a logical demonstration, a speculative achievement, nor a supernaturally communicated sum of information. It is a life that is gained in personal fellowship, a truth that is first of all a working relationship. The apprehension of this belongs only to the believing and obedient life, for its realm is that of ideals and values. Authority in such case cannot be external, whether of church or creed or Bible. The appeal is to the conviction of the hearer, the validation is by the experience of life.

Turning to the central theme of theological interest today, the doctrine of God, we find again modern tendencies that are especially congenial to the Methodist point of view. The interest of Calvinism was in the sovereign will of God, its emphasis was upon absolute power and unrestricted choice; God was first of all the Great Ruler. The emphasis of Methodism has always been upon the character of God, and his relation to men has been conceived as primarily personal and ethical. Consistently there was a vigorous assertion of moral freedom, and a sturdy moral realism in recognizing the human factor in salvation. Here is the limited God, not with the dualism of Mr. Wells, and yet truly limited by his own character and that of the world which he has shaped. More important is the essential democracy of God here as against the old absolutism. There was indeed a democracy in the old Calvinism which gave men the fear of God and delivered them from the fear of kings. But the relation between God and man was not democratized, nor the relation of God to his world. Essential to democracy are the reliance upon truth, the method of freedom, the principle of responsibility, and the obligation of service as inhering in power. Methodism emphasized the personal relation as against that of mere ruler and subject, the appeal of truth, and the response of free men. And its constant stress on the indwelling and enabling Spirit of God was a real preparation for the God of our present faith, working not as irresistible power exercised from without, but in the immanence of a moral and personal presence, himself suffering and striving and toiling that love and righteousness may triumph in the earth.

Before leaving the field of theology, consideration should be given to Methodist thought on certain questions in which it has been peculiarly interested, the questions of sin and conversion, the witness of the Spirit, and entire sanctification. In all these points there must be noted a continued interest and the occurrence of change. Earliest Methodist thought accepted the traditional Calvinistic ideas about original sin; Wesley asserted not merely total depravity but native guilt as well. Later Methodist theologians saw that this involved ideas which they repudiated. This reduction of sin to a natural state was inconsistent with their

emphasis upon moral freedom and responsibility. Further, the total depravity of Calvin left men inert and impotent in relation to all good; salvation would then be not a moral process but a mechanical affair of election at sovereign pleasure and compulsion by irresistible grace. So they declared that this utterly corrupt and impotent individual was a theological figment, since we know of no humanity apart from the Spirit of God. They recognized the absolute dependence of man upon God and did not oppose Pelagius to Augustine; but they insisted upon a "prevenient grace" whose influence left no man untouched. This has been the position of leading writers of the last two generations.

The practical importance of this position appears in connection with the question of children and religious nurture. If total depravity in the Calvinistic sense describes the status of childhood, then certain alternatives are open. Baptismal regeneration is one and Wesley as a good Anglican declared "that all who are baptized in their infancy are at the same time born again"; but this sacramentarianism did not obtain long in Methodism. More common was the idea that childhood belonged by nature to the devil until it turned to God. With this went the exclusive stress upon adult conversion as the way into the kingdom. The Methodist church today holds to neither of these views. "All children are born in the Kingdom of God," it declares, and it enforces the obligation to train the children in the church rather than to wait and win them from the world.

Earlier Methodism laid great stress upon a conscious experience of the work of the Holy Spirit as accompanying conversion and sanctification. There is just as clear realization today that the new life in man is the work of the Spirit of God, but there is less tendency to stress the emotional accompaniments and more emphasis upon the decision of a trustful and obedient will. Methodism still believes in the assurance of the Holy Spirit, in a life that is more than belief and effort, that involves love and joy and peace which men know as the gift of God and the evidence of his presence. But there is less tendency to insist upon one pattern of experience and to rest one's assurance upon varying states of feeling, and there is the conviction that the final ground of assurance

is in that mercy of God which men lay hold of by faith. The emphasis upon sanctification as a conscious and final experience at a given time must be distinguished as the form of doctrine from the substance. The form is not now generally held; there remains the emphasis upon the fact that religion means holiness of life, a holiness which is alike the gift of God and the task of man. "Loving God with all our hearts, and our neighbors as ourselves, is the perfection I have taught these forty years," wrote Wesley himself in old age. In some quarters the social meaning of this doctrine has been asserted of late, as in the social service statement adopted by the general conference of Canada.

Had the Methodist doctrine of holiness, or perfect love, been followed in all its social and economic implications, Methodism would have been the home of that passion for human brotherhood, religious in its intensity, which has been shown by many groups of men and women outside the church, and, as Mr. Dale of Birmingham has said, "Methodism would have inaugurated a revolution compared with which the Protestant reformation would have to take second place."

METHODISM AT WORK

From the discussion of the thought of the church we turn to consider its activities. To what tasks is Methodism addressing itself? In an earlier period adult evangelism was its outstanding activity. The obligation to the unchurched is still realized, but methods of work have changed. While large numbers of churches hold special evangelistic meetings as a regular part of their year's work, increasing dependence is placed upon personal work carried on the year around. Most significant, however, is the place given to religious education. There is here the recognition that preservation is better than rescue work and the realization that nine-tenths of the membership of the church has come in from its schools. Indicative of the estimate placed upon this work is the fact that it is planned to expend some two millions a year in the near future for its development and supervision under the Board of Sunday Schools, and this apart from the expenditures of the local congregation. Especial attention has been given to the development of literature for the Sunday school. The church publishing house issues now some three million copies of graded

lesson books annually, and of Sunday-school periodicals, weekly, monthly, and quarterly, some seventy million copies more.

The organized missionary work of the church developed at first very slowly, but in fact the church as a whole was a missionary body from the beginning. The beginning of Methodism might well be dated from that day when the refined and somewhat fastidious clergyman of the Church of England overcame his repugnance, remembering only the men whom he could not otherwise reach, stood in the open air outside of Bristol, and preached from the text which long years before that other young man had chosen at the beginning of his ministry: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor." In this country especially the itinerant system made possible a unique missionary work of greatest value.

Last year the church celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of its missionary society. It was made the occasion of a notable forward movement. The Methodist Episcopal church secured subscriptions amounting to one hundred and fifteen millions to cover five years, the church in the South raising a proportionate amount. With this went a thorough survey of conditions and needs in the home and foreign field conducted by specialists, with the careful outlining of larger plans for the future. Significant is the attention paid to social service and educational work. The home and foreign mission boards are planning their future work on the basis of a ten-million-dollar annual budget for each, to which amount the women's societies add some three and a half millions more. An intensive campaign of education was also carried on, large use being made of lay speakers as well as of printed materials. Training in the principles and practice of Christian stewardship was a part of this campaign, and if at times this showed a tendency to drop into a new legalism, for the most part it rested on Christian principles and often showed a fine appreciation of the larger application to industrial and social life.

In the field of education the traditional policy of the church has strongly favored denominational institutions of higher learning. The earlier tendency was to plant these in large numbers, sometimes with the easy inclination to let pious purpose make up for

defective resources. Today the church is trying to consolidate rather than multiply schools, is setting constantly rising standards, and is making often heroic efforts to give adequate support. A recent general campaign added thirty-five millions to properties and endowments. A new feature is the changing attitude toward state institutions. While the church still feels its personal obligation in the field of education and its dependence upon its own schools for Christian leadership, it is recognized that at best only a part of the field can be covered. Technical training, professional preparation, and graduate instruction demand resources beyond all but a very few church schools, and aside from this the larger facilities of the state schools attract increasing numbers of the church's young people. So the church is going where its students are in order to care for them. The first attempt was to furnish special religious care, commonly through student pastors. At the larger state institutions, such as Illinois and Wisconsin, foundations are now being established to provide social centers and courses of instruction, such as a state institution cannot furnish. The latter include the Bible and missions and aim to fit young people for Christian service.

The problem of ministerial education has been one of special difficulty in the Methodist church. The character of its early work made it necessary to admit untrained men to the ministry, and made it possible to use them to large advantage. In many churches the limited support offered still makes it impossible to command the service of well-equipped men. Meanwhile the church has always sought to supply a preacher to every congregation. Despite Mr. Wesley's insistence upon reading and study there was at first a widespread suspicion of an educated ministry. The church is not yet able to enforce the standard which it has set up of a college and seminary training, but for those who do not meet this it provides a comprehensive four years' course of study in which every candidate without seminary training must pass satisfactory examination. Four years ago this was put in charge of a special educational commission, and the plan now contemplates the development of correspondence-school work supplemented by a series of summer schools for intensive training. It

may be added that vigorous attention is being given to the matter of better pastoral support, with the setting of minimum salary standards. At the same time large endowments are being raised to furnish retiring allowances. Some twelve hundred thousand dollars in pension moneys is now being paid out annually and the amount is steadily increasing.

One other educational agency of the church deserves mention, the Book Concern. It is not generally known that this is the oldest publishing house in the country and one of the largest, its recent report showing total sales for the past quadrennium of nearly fourteen millions. Its primary purpose, as officially stated, is educational and evangelistic. It represents a policy that goes back to the beginnings of Methodism. Mr. Wesley laid the greatest stress upon an intelligent and informed people and saw the advantage of the printed page for all his work. He put forth a constant stream of pamphlets, books, and periodicals. In a day when books were a luxury he made them accessible to the common people, and it was one of the duties of his preachers to see to their circulation. And neither his publications nor his own writings were limited to the religious field. He himself, for example, translated from the German and revised a somewhat extensive popular work covering the general field of scientific knowledge, in which are included some striking anticipations of the doctrine of evolution (see J. Y. Simpson, *The Spiritual Interpretation of Nature*, pp. 287, 288). The publications of the Book Concern which are of more general interest are now put out under the imprint, The Abingdon Press. The church, at home and in the mission field, is served by a series of journals, some published independently, the principal ones by the Book Concern. The latter show a combined circulation of nearly 300,000, and their value as an agency in church work has been indicated especially in connection with the recent centenary movement.

As a final aspect of the work of Methodism its relation to the social problem must be considered. The Methodism of the nineteenth century shared the common emphasis upon an individualistic and subjective religion. There were, however, traditions that pointed in another direction. The moral earnestness of

Methodism had revived the best elements of Puritanism, and while the emphasis was sometimes unduly negative the ascetic ideal as such had no place with Wesley. He was interested in men and in all that concerned their welfare. His relation to prisons and prison reform began with the early Oxford days, when he not only brought spiritual help to prisoners but gave practical relief that secured freedom and a new chance for prisoners held, as many were, for trifling debts. He organized friendly visiting and systematic relief, established loan agencies, set up workshops in times of widespread unemployment, and founded medical dispensaries and free labor bureaus. He attacked the slave traffic and the liquor business. In this country the liquor interests have counted Methodism as one of the greatest organized forces arrayed against them.

In the common social awakening of recent years Methodism has shared to the full. With its traditional moral emphasis and its membership so largely from the common people, it ought to be pre-eminent in this field. As early as 1892 memorials were sent to the general conference requesting action upon social problems. The Methodist Federation for Social Service was formed late in 1907. The general conference of the following May adopted a notable statement of social principles, the first to be set forth by any such representative body in this country. This statement, with slight modifications, was taken over by the Federal Council of Churches six months later. Confirmed by many other religious bodies later on, it has had wide circulation as the "social creed of the churches." Since then the social message has had increasing place in the literature published by the church, in the materials for study furnished to the Sunday school, in the courses of study for ministers, as well as in the plans and discussions of the church.

The utterances of the last few years have shown a closer grasp of the underlying economic problem. In a special statement in 1918 the bishops declared in favor of "the application of democracy to industry," and for "an equitable wage for laborers, which shall have the right of way over rent, interest, and profits. We favor collective bargaining as an instrument for the attainment of industrial justice and for training in democratic procedure. We

also favor advance of the workers themselves through profit-sharing and through positions on boards of directorship." A meeting of the bishops, district superintendents, and other officials in 1919 declared not only for "the democratization of industry, but its christianization also," insisting that this "means that power, either political, economic, or industrial, shall not be monopolized by one class to the detriment or defrauding of another." In closing it called for "the open discussion in the church of these vital questions until 'the good of all shall become each man's law.' " The most definite and far-reaching Methodist statement, however, was that adopted by the general conference of the Canadian church in October, 1918. It courageously declares:

One of the causes of the Great War is the rivalry of national groups in the exploitation of undeveloped countries. The war has revealed certain moral perils, not accidental but inherent in a system of "production for profits." Industrial democracy is demanded to make political democracy effective. While the present separation of capital and labor exists, working conditions of industry should be determined by joint industrial councils. The transcendence of this separation is sooner or later inevitable and is the only "radical reform." That this new order will be based upon the appeal to service rather than love of gain is no valid objection to a Christian.

Emerging in such statements is the recognition of a task that goes far beyond ameliorative processes.

Such a movement has naturally not been without opposition. It has come from those who have feared that the individual and spiritual element of religion was being lost with the social emphasis, who failed to grasp the essentially moral and religious content of the new conception. Once or twice the hostile attitude arose apparently because there had been frank criticism of the church itself in relation to certain vested interests. Here as elsewhere the church has felt something of the reactionary spirit that has appeared since the war, with its temper of suspicion and intolerance. But on the whole these are but eddies in the stream. The wholesome effect of the new ideas is seen especially in the larger program of the church. The comprehensive ideal has become the Kingdom of God, and the coming rule of God is seen to include all life. The church is viewed as both embodiment and instrument in relation to this end. All human life is sacred and the church is interested

in all. Circumstances determine just how wide the scope of her work is to be, and it is not forgotten that her central and distinctive function is to bring to men the truth of God, to unite them in worship, and to inspire them for a service that reaches far beyond her own activities. But back of this is the growing realization of the unity of all life and the place of the church as minister to all.

CHURCH ORGANIZATION AND CHURCH UNION

There remains now the study of Methodism as an organization, including its conception of the church and its relation to the matter of Christian unity. For early Methodism as for primitive Christianity religion was, in order, a faith, a fellowship, and a task. The faith was not an inherited belief but a warm and vivid personal experience. We have noted how the task followed of necessity from the faith. The same was true of the fellowship. These two aspects constitute the essential character of Methodism as an organization. From the Methodist standpoint the church is first of all a fellowship and then an instrument for a task.

Methodism was a revival of the Christian ideal of fellowship. It found the church an institution, it made it again a brotherhood. In the main this followed from the inherent nature of the movement, in large part it was due also to Wesley's spiritual insight and genius for organization. Wesley never forgot the words of a chance companion of early days to whom he had unburdened himself: "Young man, the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion. You must find companions, or make them." So Wesley's societies contained their classes, and in turn were grouped in circuits, while a strong feeling of unity ran through the whole church, which was significantly called the connection. In band meeting, class meeting, prayer meeting, love feast, quarterly meeting, and camp meeting, the religious services were always of a pronounced social character. The mere list of these gatherings is suggestive. But the fellowship was one that reached beyond religious meetings and involved relations of friendship and mutual helpfulness. Peculiarly close has been the tie which has bound the preachers together.

The other important aspect of the Methodist conception of the church we may call the instrumental, and it is here that we find the explanation of its elaborate organization. Wesley began as a High Churchman and Methodists refer his altered opinion to the reading of a work by Lord King. But the difference goes far deeper. Some of Wesley's "High Churchism" remained with him to the end, but the dominant influence that carried him irresistibly onward lay elsewhere. The whole conception of the church as a legal institution, formed according to pattern *jure divino* and mediating the divine grace by certain exclusive rites that must be correctly performed, is at the farthest remove from Methodism. The divine character of the church is seen to be rather in the divine life that fills it and in the way in which it mediates that life to others. Wesley saw clearly the double task of winning men for this life and then of training them in Christian life and service. This task Methodism took up with an earnestness and energy never excelled, and to its execution Wesley brought an organizing and directing genius unsurpassed by any man of his age. The various features of Methodist organization were all developed in subservience to these ends.

On the side of organization Methodism has often been criticized as lacking in democracy. There is some truth in the criticism. Certainly Wesley's own administration was far from democratic. He gathered his preachers in conference and invited the freest discussion, but his own decision was final. It was a well-defined paternalism. The American church did not recognize Wesley's authority, but the system that was adopted was strongly centralized and left little power to the individual congregation or to the rank and file of the membership. The supreme body, the general conference, was composed of ministers only. The bishop, not the congregation, determined who should serve a given church. The local officers were largely nominated or appointed by the pastor.

It would be wholly false to suppose that this was due to a lack of sympathy with independence or democracy. The controlling ideal was simply effectiveness in service for the special task which

rested upon Methodism. The apparent autocracy is only the obverse of a militant efficiency. For early Methodism was a militant organization. One might find an analogon in the Salvation Army, itself sprung from Methodism and reviving some of its earlier features. The fighting nucleus was the company of preachers. They were light troops, mounted troops in literal fact in the earlier days. They came together annually for review and to receive a new assignment. There was little of impedimenta. Most of them were unmarried. The fields were largely missionary. The settled pastorate, the comfortable support, the independent and self-sufficient local congregation were wanting. Centralization and co-operation helped to explain the efficiency of this system. These were secured through the administration of given areas by the annual conference and of the church as a whole by the general conference and by the bishops. The latter administered the affairs of the church in its entirety instead of being limited each to a diocese.

In this system large changes have been made, some due to changing conditions, others to the growing influence of democratic ideals which has been apparent in all our life. The governing body of Methodism is now composed equally of ministers and laymen, and in the near future the laymen will probably participate in the business of the annual conferences. The episcopal administration has become decidedly more democratic. Nominally the bishop has authority to appoint any minister under him to any parish in his territory. In practice he is an agent of the church and intermediary between preacher and people, who, after advising with his district superintendents and committees from the churches, seeks such an adjustment as will best serve the interests of the whole. His official title is not bishop but general superintendent, and this accurately describes his function.

The church, however, is by no means inclined to give up the elements that have made for effective work in the past. It recognizes as never before the value of that sense of solidarity with its expression in a closely coherent organization which makes it possible to mass the forces of the church for a united effort as well as to extend its help to every last congregation. Such a movement as the recent Missionary Centenary was made possible only

by this mobilization of forces under central direction. Similarly there is no desire to change that system by which pastors receive their appointment, or reappointment, at one time each year. In individual cases a minister or a congregation might fare better with independent action, but there is general recognition of the great value of the system when the common welfare is considered. There are freedom and flexibility in the plan; necessary changes are made with the least friction, the minister usually attains the position for which he has capacity, churches are not left without pastors nor pastors without churches, and the disorganizing intervals between pastorates are rare.

Within limits, however, the organization is being more or less constantly changed. Methodism has shown a marked capacity for adaptation to changing conditions. The modern situation, for example, demands a greater permanency in the pastorate, so the time limit was removed, and while the pastor must still be appointed annually his term of service may continue as long as desired. The development of the episcopacy affords another interesting example. Until recently the board of bishops as a body administered the church as a whole. Each bishop was assigned a group of conferences for supervision, but they were scattered here and there and were changed annually. The church still retains the idea of a general superintendency as against a diocesan episcopacy; the bishops are elected by the church as a whole and serve the church as a whole. But eight years ago the plan was adopted of assigning to each bishop a given area for closer supervision. The intention was to locate responsibility more definitely and to secure more effective leadership. Not so long ago there was a strong tendency to limit the power of the bishops by restrictions in connection with the appointment of district superintendents and of the pastors. It is recognized now that effective leadership demands authority, and that dangers can be guarded against by making the incumbent responsible and requiring regular accounting. The general conference has defined and enlarged the duties of the bishop. He is required to make formal report to it quadrennially in writing. There is no limit to his term of office, aside from the age limit, but the general

conference may at any time retire him without preferring charges and without trial if it considers his work unsatisfactory. Of late there has been recognized in increasing measure the danger inhering in centralized control and intensive organization, the always present danger of ecclesiasticism with its office-holding (or desiring) group, its emphasis upon conformity, and its depreciation of the prophet. But the clear recognition of this danger is the greatest safeguard against it.

Reference has been made to the problem of democracy in connection with the organization of Methodism. But democracy in religion is far more than a matter of organization, and in its religious life Methodism has been in a peculiar sense an exponent of democracy. Its democracy is seen first of all, as previously indicated, in its conception of God and of his relations with man. God is conceived primarily as character, not power. He deals with man not in the relation of power but of moral appeal directed to a free personal being. There was an essential democracy in the Methodist conception of man. The words of the Duchess of Buckingham are quite in point: "Their doctrines are most repulsive, and strongly tinctured with impertinence and disrespect towards their superiors, in perpetually endeavouring to level all ranks and to do away with all distinctions, as it is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth. This is highly offensive and insulting." There was a democracy in this idea that all men were equally sinful and needy, just as there was a democracy in the assertion of that high privilege of the life with God that lifted the poor and wretched to a plane beyond which the richest and most cultured could not go. There was a democracy too in the idea of the religious life and its expression. The Spirit of God himself mediated this life to all alike and out of the direct experience of that life all could speak. There was no place here for the autocracy of priesthood claiming to control the channels of grace, or for the aristocracy of intellect which gave to the cultured alone the power to understand and the right to expound. In its class meetings and prayer meetings Methodism encouraged men to speak. There was a revival of the primitive liberty of prophesying. And in

this connection came the large use made of laymen. There were the lay preachers first of all, and the largest proportion of sermons preached in the Methodist churches of Great Britain today are still by laymen. Beyond this was the use made of laymen as class leaders and in other capacities. In line with this was the recognition of woman in which Methodism seconded the Quakers. The recognition has moved slowly in some fields, but the recent general conference contained a considerable number of women in its membership and passed a resolution providing that women might be licensed to preach.

The problem of church union is fundamentally the problem of the conception of the Christian religion. It is in the nature of this conception as held by various church groups that the real obstacle lies. If Christianity be primarily a set of doctrines authoritatively delivered, then the basis of union can only be agreement on these doctrines. If the constitutive fact be the church as an institution framed after a divine prescription and controlling the means of grace, then the form of organization and the mode of sacramental administration are decisive, and the members of the one true church can only wait for others to unite with them. In considering the relation of Methodism to church union and Christian unity we must recall its conception of religion and its special emphasis. For Methodism religion is primarily a life. The Christian religion is the life in the Spirit of Christ, gained through faith in God as revealed in Christ and lived in the fellowship of Christ's followers in worship, love, and service. With this emphasis it can be tolerant in point of doctrinal details. There is no bar to its recognition of other bodies as true churches of Jesus Christ. In the historical statement prefatory to its discipline, it finds the test of a true church in its ability to seek and to save men, concedes full freedom to others in the matter of orders, ceremonies, and government, and justifies its own forms and usages simply as aids to the fulfilling of its mission, one part of which is the promotion of fraternal relations among all branches of the one church of Jesus Christ.

For Methodism, then, the problem of church union is a practical one. Organic union is not for it the pressing concern that it must

be for those whose thought admits of but one true church. Organic union must commend itself for practical reasons. It sees reasons for this especially in relation to other Methodist bodies, and so has consummated this in Australia and Canada and is working to this end in Great Britain. During the last four years a commission has been seeking to perfect a plan of union between the Methodist Episcopal church and the Methodist church, South. A strong sentiment in both bodies is in favor of this movement, but practical difficulties have so far barred the way, and the plan of union devised by the commission was not accepted by the recent general conference of the Methodist Episcopal church. The close organization of Methodism, its centralized administration, and the presence of an extensive officary with this machinery make the merger far more difficult than in the looser union that would be involved in case of other bodies. In this case it might be called a problem of minorities. The negro membership gives the first illustration and perhaps the chief difficulty. The Methodist Episcopal church has a large colored membership in the South. It does not wish to have the negro invited out and asked to form a separate communion nor deprived of participation in the higher offices or legislative bodies. The South would prefer to have the negro in a church by himself, and not as a member of a general conference in which he would share in legislating for white churches. The southern church itself forms a second minority problem. It is outnumbered by the northern church and not unnaturally its leaders fear that in matters of legislation, administration, and election of officers it might be swamped by the larger numbers. An effort was made to solve these problems by a division of the church into large regional conferences which should be intermediary between the annual and the general conference, one of these being a racial conference which should include all the negroes. This plan awakened the apprehensions of a third minority composed of sections of the Methodist Episcopal church which would fall within the region dominated by the church in the South. While the plan was not accepted, provision was made for further negotiation. It is possible that the election of two colored general superintendents, or bishops, by the recent general conference of the

Methodist Episcopal church may be an added obstacle, but the ultimate union of the two bodies is generally expected.

In relation to other movements looking toward a larger unity of Christian spirit or to practical co-operation the church has shown active interest or at least an open mind. It has given hearty support to such organizations as the Laymen's Missionary Movement and the Anti-Saloon League. It has shared fully in the work of the Federal Council of Churches. It participated in the Interchurch World Movement. It has joined in the very practical efforts of the Home Missions' Council. It is represented in the Council of the United Churches of Christ and in the movement for a World-Conference on Faith and Order. It does not believe in the union or non-denominational church, holding that such churches lack the outlook and inspiration, the helpful direction, and the responsibilities that come with organic relation with some general body. With other churches it is sharing the growing spirit of fraternity and the earnest desire to secure better mutual understanding and closer fellowship in common faith and service.